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Discussion Paper for the 2004 Master Plan: Role and Mission of the Branch Campuses

Introduction

This paper is intended to promote a discussion of the optimal role of the branch campuses of the University of Washington and Washington State University in responding to (1) significant growth in higher education enrollment needs through the year 2010¹, and (2) state and regional economic vitalization needs.

The paper first summarizes the policy context of the branch campuses and reviews the general performance of the campuses through the 1990s. It then poses a series of policy questions about the future role branch campuses could play in meeting the above needs.

It is important to emphasize that the paper and Board discussion are intended to complement other current reviews and examinations on the future role and mission of the branch campuses. Specifically, the Washington Institute for Public Policy is developing a final report of the branch campuses, to be completed in June 2003, which will include an examination of possible changes in the role, mission, and structure of the branch campuses. This report follows from an earlier publication,² which assessed the extent to which the branch campuses were achieving their goals outlined in statute.

In addition to this study, legislation (SB 5010) has been introduced to the 2003 Legislature authorizing branch campuses to offer lower-division coursework³. Additionally, Washington State University recently announced its plan to create a Washington State University system in which the Vancouver, Spokane, and Tri-Cities campuses would have greater autonomy and would no longer be considered “branches” of the Pullman campus. This plan envisions changes to the governance structure of the “newer” campuses, complementing the direction for greater autonomy.⁴ It also calls for a continuation of the “two-plus-two” model and strong relationships with area community colleges.

¹ As discussed at the Board’s January 2003 meeting, to maintain only the current rate of service, the state will need to fund 33,600 additional full-time equivalent student slots by 2010.

² See: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Higher Education Branch Campuses in Washington State: Interim Report*, December 2002.

³ Appendix A provides the text of SB 5010.

⁴ See Appendix B: V. Lane Rawlins, “*Preliminary Recommendations for Newer Campuses of Washington State University*”, January 2003.

Taken collectively, it appears appropriate that the 2004 Master Plan for Higher Education give careful consideration to these discussions and the question of how the resources of the branch campuses can be best planned and used to respond to near and long-term needs for access to quality programs of higher education.

The First Decade – Policy, Plans, and Performance

In 1985, the Legislature adopted RCW 28B.80 to create the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). The Legislature directed the Board to prepare a state master plan for higher education whose "initial priorities (of the plan) should be applied to heavily populated areas underserved by public institutions."

The Board presented its "Washington State Master Plan for Higher Education" (Building a System) in December 1987. The plan proposed an expansion of higher education access through the creation of branch campuses in four urban areas – Vancouver, the Tri-Cities, Spokane, and the Puget Sound region. The master plan also designated institutional responsibilities for each of the proposed campuses and directed the assigned institutions to develop and submit plans for the branch campuses for HECB review.

In August 1988, the University of Washington and Washington State University each submitted their plans for the development of their respective campuses. In response to these plans, the Board sought and obtained further implementation authority for the branch campuses from the 1989 Legislature. Specifically, Engrossed Senate Bill 6095, an act relating to branch campuses (codified as 28B RCW), provided legislative endorsement of the branch campus concept and formalized, in law, the institutional responsibilities for the urban areas to be served.

An important aspect of this legislation was the statement of legislative intent⁵ that the branch campuses were intended to promote increased access to upper-division and graduate degree programs in the state's underserved urban areas, particularly for individuals who, due to occupational requirements or other constraints, could not participate in conventional four-year university programs. To accomplish this objective, the Legislature directed the branches, in cooperation with area community colleges, to adopt a "two-plus-two" model, admitting students for upper-division coursework who had received sufficient lower-division coursework credit from other institutions.

The Legislature directed that the role and mission of the campuses would be guided by policies adopted by the HECB. The Board first disseminated these rules or guidelines in 1990, under its statutorily directed plan for the orderly development of the branch campuses.⁶ In addition to the enrollment and capital development plan proposed for the campuses, the Board's plan included specific policies on the role and mission of the campuses (Resolution 90-10).⁷ The policies specify, in part, that:

⁵ The text of the Legislative Findings is presented in Appendix C.

⁶ See: Higher Education Coordinating Board, "*Design for the 21st Century: Expanding Higher Education Opportunity in Washington*," July 1990.

⁷ See Appendix D.

“(T)he branch campuses are upper-division – not four-year institutions... (They) will offer the upper-division courses required for the major in specific degree programs and a selection of upper-division elective courses. They may also offer a limited number of lower-division courses normally required by upper-division students to complete their degree program requirements, in consultation with the local community colleges. Juniors and seniors normally will be expected to take all of the coursework needed to complete their degrees on one campus.”⁸

The initial policies also emphasized the instructional mission of the campuses by “prohibit(ing) doctoral degrees at branch campuses... (and) limit(ing) research and community service projects to those that contribute to instructional programs in a significant way”.⁹ The Board amended this policy in 1997 to allow exceptions to the prohibition of doctoral degrees on a case-by-case basis.^{10,11}

Within this policy context the branch campuses grew throughout the 1990s, and, as of 2001, represented 11 percent of all public upper-division and graduate enrollment (7,248 student FTE).¹² This growth, requiring a capital investment of \$515 million,¹³ while slower than initially planned by the HECB, has resulted in a wide array of programs and degree opportunities.¹⁴

How this growth in both size and program has supported the earlier goals and objectives of the campuses was the focus of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) study. In general, the WSIPP study concluded that available data “indicate(s) that branch campuses are fulfilling their mission”.¹⁵ Specifically:

- While Washington continues to rank low in upper-division and graduate participation, participation rates have increased for younger age groups. The branch campuses have accounted for half of all upper-division and graduate enrollment growth since 1990, and have accounted for 84 percent of upper-division and graduate enrollment growth in the urban areas they were designed to serve.
- The branch campuses appear to target and attract placebound students. Half of all classes are scheduled for evenings or weekends, and branch campus students are older and participate on a part-time basis more often than students at the UW Seattle and WSU Pullman campuses.
- While available data do not allow the regional economic impacts of the branches to be estimated, it was found that, with the exception of engineering, the branch campuses are offering programs that reflect regional occupational projections.

⁸ See: *Design for the 21st Century*, p. 18.

⁹ See: *Design for the 21st Century*, pp. ix-x.

¹⁰ See Appendix E: HECB Resolution 97-07.

¹¹ Three exceptions have been made, all pertaining to pharmacy degrees.

¹² WSIPP, p. 38.

¹³ See Appendix F for a summary of branch campus capital expenditures.

¹⁴ See Appendix G for an inventory of current program/degree offerings.

¹⁵ WSIPP, p. 4

The Next Decade – Future Directions

The 2004 Master Plan should address the role branch campuses can play in responding to increasing enrollment demand and state and regional economic growth and propose specific guidance and actions.

Specifically, should the 2004 Master Plan assume the continuation of the current mission, role, structure, and academic orientation of the branch campuses? Or, should the 2004 Master Plan explore new ways of thinking about and planning for the future role of these resources and the types of programs and degrees they offer?

Previous master plans have not considered any significant change in the role, mission, or structure of the branch campuses. Instead they have used existing policy to estimate how the branch campuses would contribute to accommodating increased enrollment demand.

The 2004 Master Plan should certainly and carefully address both the expected enrollment “take” of the branch campuses, as well as the nature and relevancy of the type of academic instruction being offered by the campuses. The 2004 Master Plan also should consider the *possibility* that alternatives to the role, mission, and structure of the branch campuses could, in the foreseeable future, represent significant decisions regarding the optimal value of the branch campus investment.

This paper hopes to begin a discussion of these important policy and planning issues by posing the following questions:

Does proposed Senate Bill 5010 or Washington State University’s plan to create a state university system represent a departure from current legislative intent that the branch campuses operate on a two-plus-two model?

The framework of existing statute and policy already provides the authority for the branch campuses to offer lower-division coursework. Specifically, RCW 28B specifies that the branch campuses shall offer programs as authorized by rules or guidelines adopted by the HECB. And, HECB policies authorize branch campuses to offer lower-division courses in collaboration with area community colleges.

The announced planning process and objectives for a Washington State University system clearly commit to a continuation of the two-plus-two model in the operation of the WSU branch campuses. In particular, WSU has expressed its commitment to offer lower-division coursework at its branch campuses only when area community colleges agree and grant “permission” for such offerings.

Notwithstanding these observations, it would seem reasonable to discuss if either proposed SB 5010 or the WSU plan could represent a foundation for changing the role, mission, and structure of the branch campuses. This issue is the focus of the next discussion question.

Will the two-plus-two model continue to represent the optimal alternative in meeting both lower- and upper-division demands for access?

Since the inception of the branch campus model, an underlying assumption has been the continuing capacity of the community colleges to generate a sufficient number of academic transfer students for the branch campuses and thereby contribute to an increase in upper-division participation levels. The Washington Institute for Public Policy study of the branches confirmed that the community colleges were contributing significantly to the enrollment at the branch campuses. In fall 2001, 71 percent of incoming students to the branch campuses came from community colleges.¹⁶

An important area for discussion when exploring this question will be the capacity of the community and technical colleges to continue this level of contribution in the face of increasing expectations for programs not oriented toward academic transfer students. Specifically, the community and technical colleges provide an array of programs; the majority, based on FTE enrollment, are not intended for academic transfer students.

A discussion of the role of the community and technical colleges in fulfilling the objectives of the branch campuses through the two-plus-two model must include a dialogue about these potentially competing expectations and the capacity of the community and technical colleges to successfully respond to them. This discussion could lead to an exploration of the next question.

Should a policy framework be established to initiate and guide possible future planning efforts for the orderly transition of some branch campuses into four-year institutions?

This discussion question is *not* about whether the 2004 Master Plan should propose transforming any of the existing branch campuses into four-year baccalaureate institutions. Instead this question asks if the 2004 Master Plan should establish a policy-planning framework for considering any future proposals for such change.

The rationale behind the question is tied to the policy history of the development of the campuses. Specifically, as discussed earlier, the 1987 Legislature directed the HECB to “develop a plan for the orderly development of the branch campuses.” This directive recognized the complexities of creating new institutions of higher education and required that specific policies and guidelines be in place to guide the creation and development of the new campuses.

Accordingly, this discussion question asks if it is now appropriate to establish the policy framework to evaluate and guide any future proposal or decision to convert a branch campus into a four-year institution. Such a policy framework would need to address many considerations, issues, and questions, including, but not limited to:

¹⁶ WSIPP, p. 75.

What indicators would be used to ascertain sufficient lower-division enrollment demand?

What type of criteria could be used to examine the relevance of a new four-year institution to regional economic needs and goals?

How would the impact of a new four-year institution on existing public and private two and four-year institutions be determined?

What admission standards and policies would be used for entering freshman?

Would the institution be structured as a traditional comprehensive or research institution offering academic programs or degrees? Or would a new model be a planning priority (e.g., four-year technical degrees)?

Would the institution be designed or operated to attract non-traditional as well traditional students?

Would placebound students remain a target population?

What governance structure would be created?

What would be the tuition and financial aid implications for students who otherwise would have attended a community college?

What cost model for both operating and capital requirements would be used in planning a new campus?

Again, the above list of issues and questions is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the breadth of issues that would need to be addressed in a coherent policy to guide future plans and decisions about the future of the branch campus resource.

Next Steps

As explained in the introduction, this paper is intended to begin a discussion of how the branch campuses will help achieve the state's long-term goals for access to a quality system of public higher education. Following the Board's discussion, staff will prepare a second paper outlining specific alternatives or options the Board may wish to consider on the future role of the branch campuses. In developing this second paper, staff will work closely with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, higher education representatives, state policymakers, and other interested individuals.

For a hard copy of the appendices, please call 360.753.7800.

Appendices

Appendix A	Text of SB 5010
Appendix B	Preliminary Recommendations for Newer Campuses of WSU
Appendix C	Text of 28B.45.010
Appendix D	HECB Resolution No. 90-10
Appendix E	HECB Resolution No. 97-07
Appendix F	Branch Campus Capital Expenditures
Appendix G	Inventory of Branch Campus Programs